

CREATIVE LEARNING: People and Pathways



Convening Partner



Convening Partner



Managing Partner



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Executive Summary

In 2007, Big Thought launched Thriving Minds, a partnership that brings together resources from the City of Dallas, Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) and more than 100 arts, cultural, educational, youth development and social service organizations to prepare students to succeed academically and in life. Thriving Minds provides free and low cost creative learning programs and other academic support services to students in grade K-8 in classrooms, after-school programs and neighborhood facilities across the city.

After conducting extensive research during the first three years of Thriving Minds, six important principles emerged – “learnings” that describe how young people develop creatively and the pathways that promote creative growth.

Learning One: Highly creative youth are successful—they attend, achieve and give back. Research shows that highly creative children have more consistent school attendance, higher academic achievement, and may be primed for greater leadership and community involvement. Participation in Thriving Minds’ sustained creative learning opportunities is yielding evidence of increased academic achievement and more consistent school attendance among Dallas ISD students.

Learning Two: Young people who thrive as innovators and creators make active choices. Studies show that young people who thrive as innovators and creators do so because they choose to—not just because of native endowment like good health, high IQ or inherited wealth. Highly creative youth make daily choices that build their imaginations and transform interest into achievements. Thriving Minds gives young people more opportunities to make creative choices.

Learning Three: Family and social support is critical to developing youth creativity. Social networks—both inside and outside families—deeply affect young people’s development. Children need caring adults in order to thrive. Thriving Minds develops processes to engage parents and other adults on a neighborhood level, to provide children with the support they need to pursue their creative interests and passions.

Learning Four: Creative learning experiences should align with demand. Dallas offers abundant creative learning opportunities. But these resources are wasted if they are not of interest to children and if parents do not know about them. By communicating with families about existing programs, better understanding what children want—and are not receiving—and working with partners to expand and focus programming, we are working to match supply and demand.

Learning Five: Where children live often determines their access to creative learning. Geography should not determine access to creative learning. But while some highly-resourced families have traditionally had access to many experiences, other families have had little or no access. Thriving Minds’ system of neighborhood hubs focuses on places where building more opportunities for young people is critical. We make sure that creative learning is everywhere children live and learn.

Learning Six: For true equity, the quality of creative instruction must be ensured. It is not enough to provide children with choice and opportunities. The offerings must be of consistently high quality. The development of quality standards and a trained creative learning workforce ensure that all children have access to excellence in creative learning.

Moving Forward

Thriving Minds’ overall goal for 2010-13, is to increase the depth and quality of the offerings already in place. We will also concentrate on connecting out-of-school time programs and bringing them to scale. Priorities include:

Increase Access

- Continue to identify available resources and gaps in service;
- establish year-round program sites in every Dallas neighborhood;
- engage 500+ neighborhood leaders to plan and implement opportunities; and
- coordinate a set of civic outcomes for out-of-school time creative learning.

Increase quality

- increase the number and diversity of trained, qualified creative learning instructors;
- certify experienced artists as master teachers who mentor novice and apprentice instructors;
- create an instructor qualification system;
- provide enhanced professional development for in-school instructors; and
- provide other tiered professional development for creative learning instructors.

As Big Thought begins Phase II of Thriving Minds, our vision remains unchanged—**successful children, strong families** and **vibrant neighborhoods**. Since 2007, we have listened, we have learned and we have responded. Now, thanks to our partners, we have come together once again to turn the vision into reality.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This report synthesizes the research and evaluation collected and analyzed between 2006 and 2010, and is one of three companion documents. Two detailed studies, *Paving High-Quality Learning Pathways* and *Developing Creative Capital in Children and Families* provide deeper exploration of the learnings presented in this report. Together, these reports provide an in-depth look into the wide-ranging, complex world of creative learning in Dallas. To find these reports, as well as individual research studies, please visit bigthought.org/research.

What makes a city great? The keys to Dallas' future growth and prosperity are successful children, strong families and vibrant neighborhoods. To achieve these goals we must harness the creativity of every citizen, young and old. At Big Thought, we believe that opportunities to develop children's creative capital—to experience beauty, be inspired, express oneself, imagine new possibilities, explore and solve problems and design a new and better future—are fundamental rights of all children.¹ To ensure that we can develop the best in every child and benefit from their creativity, we must provide equitable access to high-quality creative learning that fosters these experiences and skills. This is the responsibility of every person who shapes policy and provides services to young people.

From the earliest days of our work, Big Thought has embarked on a continuing cycle of listening, learning and responding. We listen to our community members, to national researchers, and to our partners and supporters. We learn all we can, establishing a true picture of opportunities, challenges, needs and wishes. We respond based on all we have heard and learned. Then we listen again, checking in with those we heard from, to ensure that our work is effective.

LISTENING

Less than a decade ago, more than 50% of Dallas Independent School District elementary students received limited or no weekly arts instruction. In 2006, The Wallace Foundation asked Big Thought to rally the community. The foundation envisioned a coordinated effort to surround children with the arts in everyday life.

Big Thought, the City of Dallas, Dallas Independent School District and many community leaders began an extensive effort to learn about Dallas, to analyze the needs and wishes of the people of the city and to develop a creative learning initiative that would be a national model. One thing we did not know when we started was the full set of challenges facing our city. How close did our city come to living up to our visionary ideal? Through community meetings, surveys, interviews, focus groups and an inventory of resources, we began to see the way forward.

Dallas is a large, urban community with a high concentration of poverty,² where opportunities for citizens to imagine, invent or express themselves creatively have not been equitably distributed.³ Our research led to a much deeper understanding of why this was so as we examined creative learning among children, families and communities within Dallas and the key barriers to building a fair and accessible system.

LEARNING

It became apparent that community perceptions often differed from the reality we found. We identified a number of “arts learning myths” that helped us better understand some widespread community beliefs. These myths played a significant role in helping us decide where to focus our work as we moved forward.

Big Thought's findings, corroborated by national research, suggested several things.

MYTH #1: Arts learning in Dallas is centered around formal fine arts instruction.

REALITY: A wide range of other creative activities beyond traditional arts disciplines are valued & meaningful, such as gardening, cooking and storytelling.

MYTH #2: Arts learning in Dallas takes place primarily in schools and within cultural organizations.

REALITY: Home is often the most important venue for early arts learning. Family members and neighbors are cultural role models and early teachers.

MYTH #3: In-school and out-of-school programs require separate planning and design.

REALITY: Sustained opportunities for kids often depend on effective coordination among in-school and out-of-school programs. Only some families report an exclusive reliance on one or another of these—in fact, many see them as linked.⁴

First, that the power of creativity to change lives goes beyond traditional fine arts disciplines and includes many less formal activities that are meaningful to children and families.

Second, that these activities are often found in homes and community settings and do not require expensive arts venues or school facilities.⁵

¹ Wolf and Holochwost, *Building Creative Capital: A White Paper*, 2009 <http://www.wolfbrown.com/index.php?page=building-creative-capital>

² The state accountability database for 2007-08 reports 85% of children in Dallas ISD qualify for free and reduced-price meals. According to 2000 census data, 75% of school-age children in Dallas attend Dallas ISD schools.

³ Young Audiences of Greater Dallas, *ArtsPartners: An Arts and Culture in Education Program Created for the Office of Cultural Affairs, City of Dallas, 1998.*

⁴ Thriving Minds Planning Research for Spring 2006, Research Synthesis www.bigthought.org/whatwedo/researchassessment/researcharchive

⁵ Wali, Alaka, et. al., *Informal Arts: Finding Cohesion, Capital and Other Cultural Benefits in Unexpected Places*, 2002.



Finally, a systemic approach to learning that integrates the power of home, school and community is more likely to ensure that all children develop the skills they need to succeed.⁶

As Big Thought continued listening, parents were a critical source of information, even to the point of influencing the way we discussed our work. In focus groups held across the city, they strongly preferred the description “creative” activities for their children, suggesting:

the word “creative” has strongly positive connotations associated with awakening the imagination, interaction and freedom of choice;

“creative” seemed a more gender-neutral term for young boys who might feel social pressure not to get involved with “arts” activities;

and “arts” activities might suggest crafts projects to some—activities that did not feel as creative, imaginative or choice-based.⁷

What began as an “arts learning” initiative was broadened. “Creative learning” became the term used to describe a wide array of learning approaches, disciplines and activities, and “Thriving Minds” became the name of the citywide partnership that fosters creative learning.

RESPONDING

The Thriving Minds partnership began with the simple and powerful idea that opportunities to be creative are key drivers in improving the lives of children, families and communities. But we needed to test the idea. It was heady to believe that if all young people simply had the opportunity and support that allowed them to imagine, then Dallas could look forward to healthier neighborhoods, more competitive industries, and a richer public life. The partners (Big Thought, Dallas ISD and the City of Dallas) made a commitment to test each assumption to ensure that the community’s investment in the concept would be worthwhile and lasting. It was essential to develop the best strategies for achieving this ideal—and to find evidence to corroborate these strongly held beliefs.

From 2007 to 2010, Big Thought, with the support of our partners, has designed and developed a good portion of the creative learning system we originally envisioned for Dallas. Thriving Minds is unique in its scope, offering both in-school and out-of-school time learning experiences provided by certified teachers and qualified community instructors. It delivers a variety of services that broaden the notion of traditional arts learning to include other subject areas that encompass elements of creativity. With a community-wide and comprehensive approach, Dallas aspires to be the first city in the nation that offers children and families equitable access to creative learning opportunities. We are ensuring that these opportunities are closely aligned with what children are learning in the classroom **and** that they are responsive to the needs of distinct neighborhoods.⁸

Assessing and testing is central to the success of Thriving Minds. Our process of listening, learning and responding has shaped its entire design and continues to do so. In the following pages we share some of the most important things we have learned and how we responded.

⁶ Gordon, Edmund W., Beatrice L. Bridglall and Aundra Saa Meroe, eds. *Supplementary Education: The Hidden Curriculum of High Academic Achievement*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004. <http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com>; “A New Day for Learning: A Report from the Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force.” C.S. Mott Foundation, January 2007. <http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/ANewDayforLearning.pdf>; Rothman, Robert, Ed. *City Schools: How Districts and Communities Can Create Smart Education Systems*. Harvard Education Press, 2007. <http://www.hepg.org/hepg/Book/68>

⁷ Responding to and Building Demand, www.bigthought.org/research

⁸ Bodilly, Susan J. and Catherine H. Augustine, *Revitalizing Arts Education Through Community-Wide Coordination*, Rand Corporation, 2008: 39.

Young People and Creative Learning



COMMUNITY VOICE: “Some of the parents would come only on the days that Thriving Minds instructors were at the center. They wanted to work with their children to actually make something and take it home. After one mom worked with her child and saw all the different things that we were doing, she began volunteering. And it brought her closer to her son.”

—Shuane Barahona, community member

In Thriving Minds, we embrace the view of the arts as a critical component of creative learning. Among other things, we have revitalized the teaching of visual art and music in schools, increasing the number of fine arts instructors and ensuring that every Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) elementary child has regular arts opportunities during the school day. At the same time, we believe that a person, family or community can imagine and express new possibilities through creative activities that go well beyond the fine arts: keeping a journal, conducting science experiments, or cooking a meal. We refer to this ability as creative capital.⁹

Halfway through Phase I (2007-2010) of Thriving Minds, Big Thought drew new conclusions about the best way to chart our progress and to test our ideas about the impact of creative learning and its potential for development. It would not be enough to count the number of teachers or courses offered or the hours that children spent in class. Rather, our partners challenged us to develop a more powerful way of describing how children are transformed by these efforts and how Thriving Minds contributes to shared civic outcomes such as workforce preparedness.

As a result, we held a set of community-based family interviews in multiple neighborhoods to understand how children and families benefit from creative learning. We knew that because children were different, creativity was likely to be expressed differently in each child.

Four characteristics of youth creativity emerged as most revealing when a large group of children was considered: participation, sustained engagement, social support and achievement and recognition (see next page). They also gave us a window to understanding the nature of highly creative children.

CREATIVE CAPITAL

In the context of Thriving Minds, creative capital is the ability of a person, family or community to imagine new possibilities. When children engage in high quality and sustained creative learning activities they build key 21st century skills, like the ability to generate ideas, elaborate, analyze, think critically, problem solve and collaborate.

With these skills, and the opportunity to exercise them, children can become individuals who imagine and create new possibilities for themselves and their communities.

CREATIVE
LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES



LEARNING AND
INNOVATION
SKILLS



POSSIBILITY OF
A NEW AND
BETTER FUTURE

⁹ Wolf and Holochwost, *Building Creative Capital: A White Paper*, 2009 <http://www.wolfbrown.com/index.php?page=building-creative-capital>

	CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH CREATIVE CAPITAL	DEFINITION	HIGHLY CREATIVE CHILDREN
	Current Participation in Creative Activities	Ways in which a child is currently engaged in creative learning opportunities in school (whether mandatory or elective), after school, in the community or at home	<p>Have twice the number of hours of in-school fine arts instruction</p> <p>Take lessons or classes out of school</p>
	Sustained Engagement in Creative Activities	The extent to which a child maintains involvement in one or many creative activities	<p>Maintain involvement in organized creative activities</p> <p>Continue meaningful creative activities across settings (e.g., home and school)</p>
	Supportive Family and/or Social Network	Evidence of family and other relationships that spark and support a child's creative development	<p>Have extended role models in and outside the family that encourage creative activities</p> <p>Engage in many creative activities with siblings or family peers</p> <p>Teach friends to do creative activities</p>
	Achievement and Recognition	Evidence that a young person has been identified or recognized as a creative individual by others or him/herself	<p>Can discuss the value of their creative activity</p> <p>Have received an award or other form of recognition for a creative activity</p>

Based on information collected during interviews, youth's creative capital was determined by measuring how much each of these characteristics were evident in their activities and daily lives. By looking at who had high creative capital we were able to begin to investigate how families and children developed high levels of creativity.¹⁰

As a way of listening and checking back with the community, as well as learning more details about these characteristics of high creativity, we surveyed nearly 2,000 Dallas ISD parents and students. Combining results from the interviews and survey gave us the focus we needed to spur creative development of Dallas children and families.

¹⁰ Children were assigned percentile ranks that determined their Youth Creative Capital groups: Very High (86th-99th percentiles), High (50th to 85th percentiles), Moderate (17th to 49th percentiles), and Low (1st to 16th percentiles).

Learning 1:

Highly creative youth are successful—they attend, achieve and give back.

Big Thought believes that creativity breeds success. We turned to national researchers for confirmation. Their work shows that highly creative children have more consistent school attendance, higher academic achievement,¹¹ and may be primed for greater leadership and community involvement.¹² Business and policy leaders have been conducting their own research. Their findings show that creativity and innovation are mandatory skills for children's success as future citizens and workers.¹³

Despite this strong evidence of the value of creativity, prior to 2007

- more than 50% of Dallas ISD elementary students received limited or no weekly arts instruction;
- Dallas ISD had no kindergarten through grade 12 fine arts curricula or formal curricula that integrated arts into other academic subjects;
- fine arts teachers had no designated funds for community arts programming.

Armed with compelling data and a challenging local picture, the Thriving Minds partners designed interventions that would provide students with sustained creative learning opportunities.

Together we accomplished the following:

- passage of a new Dallas ISD Board of Education policy mandating weekly arts instruction for every elementary student—45 minutes each of music and visual art—delivered by certified specialists;
- hiring of 140 Dallas ISD in-school fine arts teachers;
- fast track development of a new Dallas ISD fine arts curriculum for students in kindergarten through grade 12;
- realignment of the existing arts integration program—ArtsPartners—with new Dallas ISD curricula in fine arts, math, science, social studies and language arts;
- increased use of community cultural programming in schools.

After instituting these new in-school interventions, Big Thought measured their effectiveness using surveys and interviews with students and their families. We found evidence of increased academic achievement and more consistent school attendance. We discovered that out-of-school time creative learning also had an impact on achievement.

¹¹ Catterall, James, *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art: A 12-Year Longitudinal Study*, Imagination Group: I-Group Books, 2009.

¹² Benson, Peter L., *Sparks: How Parents Can Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers*, Search Institute, 2008.

¹³ The Partnership for 21st Century Skills - www.21stcenturyskills.org

Based on data from our “Survey of Creative Capital of Dallas Children and Families” and Dallas ISD databases, we found that reading scores on state tests (e.g., Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS) improved as students engaged in some specific behaviors.

Scores improved when students took part in longer periods of sustained engagement in the same fine arts discipline. High school students taking dance, music, theater or visual art courses for three or four years scored close to 100 scale points higher on TAKS Reading than those taking fewer courses. When students participated in clubs and groups that focused on all kinds of creative activities, (e.g., fine arts, science, math or media at both the elementary and secondary levels), average scale scores for both TAKS reading and math were at least 50 points higher.

Interestingly, we discovered that out-of-school time creative learning also had an impact on achievement. In 2008, the Thriving Minds after-school program was established to increase the out-of-school offerings available to 2,000 students. After only one year, it was determined that students demonstrating a thorough knowledge of Reading, or scoring at the Commended level on TAKS Reading, averaged more hours of after-school programming in fine arts, science and math enrichment and humanities (such as character development, leadership and team building) than their peers.



THE BOTTOM LINE

Highly creative youth have more consistent school attendance, higher academic achievement and are more likely to give back to their community. By providing students with regular creative learning opportunities in school and during out-of-school time, we are opening up pathways to success.

Learning 2:

Young people who thrive as innovators and creators make active choices.

We usually think of creativity as innate and rare, believing that only a fortunate few are born with the capacity to imagine and innovate. But there is compelling evidence that young people who thrive as innovators and creators do so because they choose to, not just because of native endowment like good health, high IQ or inherited wealth. They try new activities, stick with their projects, use free time to practice, and choose their friends and role models on the basis of creative characteristics. In other words, they practice the habits of highly productive adults.¹⁴

This raises an important question—if we understand the kinds of choices creative children make and the kinds of programs that support these choices, could many more children become creative thinkers?

First, consider how many young people in Dallas are interested in creative activities.¹⁵

- Many children—even young children—are interested in specific forms of dance (such as tango, salsa and break dancing) and music (especially guitar, drums and keyboard) that are often shaped by popular culture.
- The average Dallas ISD student spends 11 hours a week doing out-of-school creative activities from science to creative writing. Three in 10 students belong to at least one creative club or group.
- In their out-of-school time, one in four children takes lessons or classes.

At the same time, many children in Dallas do not or cannot transform these interests into creative activity.

- In any given year, nearly half (47%) of all Dallas ISD high school students take fine arts courses. However, only 21% of the courses taken are beyond an introductory level.
- Only 30% of Dallas ISD students produced 70% of reported out-of-school creative activity.
- Only 45% of interviewed children reported doing creative activities with friends or siblings.

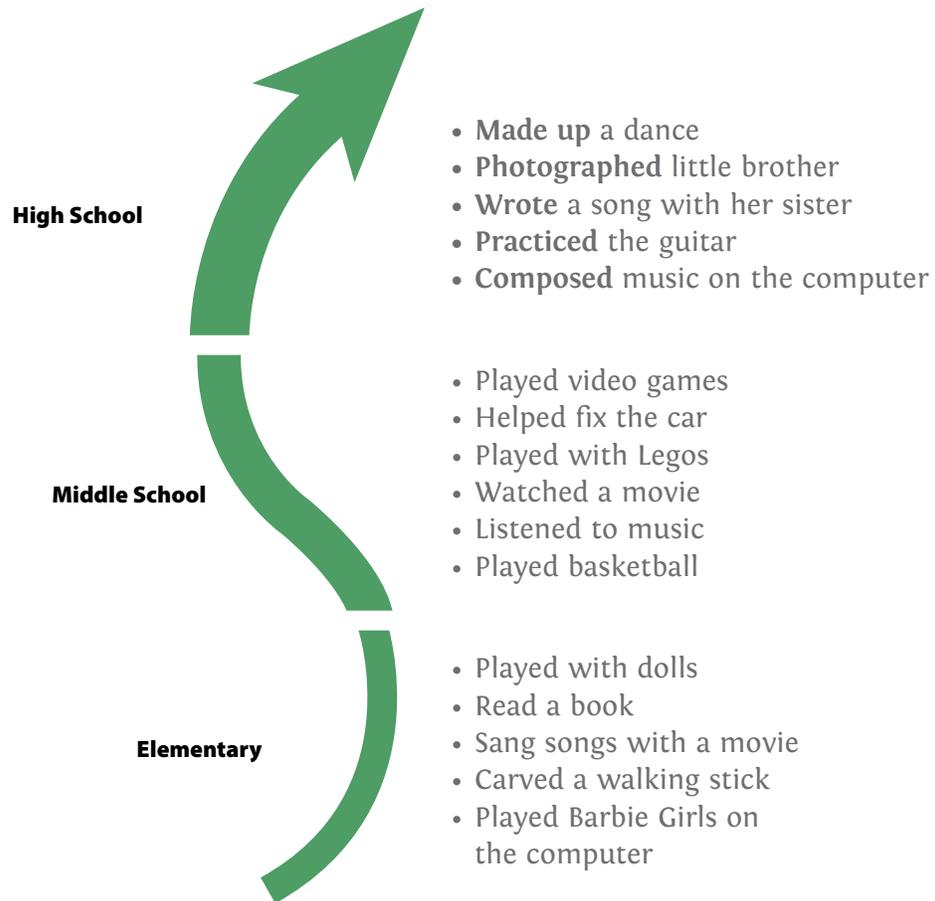
Interviews with Dallas families and children reveal how young people and their families can transform initial interest into remarkable achievements. By looking closely at a subset of highly creative students,¹⁶ we are learning how their personal choices, as well as their families' supports, are literally creating their creativity.

Highly creative children make daily choices that build their imaginations, just as daily exercise builds muscles. For instance, they use their free time in inventive ways. The pathway arrow on the next page shows activities described by children at different grade ranges. By the time these children mature in high school, they have traveled from playing with what others create, to becoming creators themselves (as indicated by the bold type in the chart on the next page).

¹⁴ Carneiro & Heckman, 2003; Harris, 2002; Little, 2002; Seligman, 1996, 2002, 2004.

¹⁵ These data come from recent surveys of over 5,000 Dallas children and families conducted by Big Thought from 2007 to 2009.

¹⁶ As defined by their Youth Creative Capital score discussed on page 6.



Pursuing a talent takes the courage to make bold, large-scale choices. Consider what these highly creative youth chose.

- Rather than spend money on her 15th birthday quinceañera, one young lady asked her family to contribute to her travels to a foreign country.
- Rather than working in a mall, a young man taught music at a Thriving Minds Summer Camp.
- Rather than sleeping in during summer break, several youth worked in the August heat to learn welding as a job and artistic skill.

These young people are making choices that influence not just their creative capital, but the course of their lives. Where does the courage to make these choices

come from? As we will discuss on the next page, our data suggest that families at every economic level play a powerful role in their children’s creative development. Time and money can buy opportunities, but a family’s own investment in and support of creativity is the most powerful predictor of a child’s investment in creativity.

But there are also young people who carve out their own path. We learned in family interviews that 10% of the children with high creative capital belong to families with few resources and little history of creative activities. How do these children manage to exceed their families’ creative capital? Some are enrolled in Thriving Minds after-school creative learning programs. Others take full advantage of courses and electives at their schools. And, teenagers often work to pay for the lessons and programs they want. All have found their own ways to place value on their creative interests.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Highly creative youth make daily choices that build their imaginations and transform interest into achievements. Thriving Minds gives young people more opportunities to make creative choices.

Learning 3:

Family and social support is critical to developing youth creativity.

Social networks—both inside and outside their families—deeply affect young people’s development. Children need caring adults in order to thrive. Even as we recognize the power of individual imagination, it is increasingly clear that the inclination to wonder, to explore and to invent is often contagious. Children exhibit it, not just because they are gifted, but because it matters to the people who matter to them, and because it is noticed, valued and celebrated in their communities.¹⁷

The family is often a starting point for a child’s creative activity. Consider what children told us about where, and how often, they take part in creative activities.¹⁸

- Their homes are the dominant setting and, at times, the only place where some children engage in creative learning activities.
- A great deal of their creative learning happens informally and within the context of the family. Participation levels are consistently higher for informal learning as opposed to instructional learning.

These findings suggest further thinking about peer-to-peer instruction outside of school and illustrate the central role of out-of-school learning.

Big Thought has long explored how to engage parents and other key family members. This work has expanded with the development of the Thriving Minds partnership. Over time we have found that

- awareness develops through neighborhood networks such as church gatherings and PTAs;
- personal experiences are the entry points for parent engagement;
- education often comes through collaborative knowledge-sharing and problem-solving among parents;
- involvement in programmatic design focuses parents’ knowledge and energy;
- advocacy comes through sustained participation, which leads to greater commitment;
- parent leaders can effectively advocate and serve as ambassadors.

The community also plays a key role in building creative capital. Interviews we conducted in the spring of 2008 revealed that about 50% of a child’s creative capital mirrors his or her family’s creative capital. The other half is influenced by teachers, peers, other adults and the child him- or herself.¹⁹

Often, children spend a number of years with the same teacher or mentor who oversees their creative development. These relationships are critical. Teens who feel that others value their creative passions are three times more likely to have a sense of hopeful purpose, be actively engaged in school, and take on leadership roles.²⁰ Young people with high levels of Youth Creative Capital also tend to have more adult role models.²¹

¹⁷ Latour, 2005; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003

¹⁸ These data come from surveys of over 5,000 Dallas children and families conducted by Big Thought 2007-2008.

¹⁹ These data come from family interviews collected by Big Thought 2008-2009.

²⁰ TeenVoice 2009, The Untapped Strength of 15-Year-Old, The SEARCH Institute (2009).

²¹ These data come from family interviews collected by Big Thought 2008-2009.

Role models from within the extended family, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, share creative activities like cooking, sewing, making up songs, building a tree house, playing pretend games, playing the guitar and visiting museums. Adult role models outside the family, such as scout leaders, teachers, parents of friends and mentors from community groups, share with children both the love of their craft and leadership qualities.

Children with the highest Youth Creative Capital scores spend significantly more time taking part in creative activities with peer or siblings, without adults present. These children also spend time teaching peers or siblings how to do creative activities that they enjoy. Children often spend hours and even years with peers that have made the same choices.

Recognizing the vital influence of both parents and community on individual creative development Big Thought, through Thriving Minds, responded in the following ways:

- Meetings with parents to understand the opportunities and challenges of providing creative learning for their children. Whole families came together to eat dinner; then children enjoyed creative learning activities while, parents and staff began collaborating.
- Identifying and organizing 150 neighborhood leaders—family members, youth mentors and creative learning programmers—to advance and implement year-round creative learning in their neighborhoods.
- Convening these neighbors to write Creative Learning Plans—strategic plans to fully use existing opportunities and identify needs for new or additional programming.

Together parents, community members and children themselves provide the support needed to build a solid creative learning foundation.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Family and community support are critical to developing creative children. By developing processes to engage parents and other adults on a neighborhood level, we're providing children with the support they need to pursue their creative interests and passions.

Learning 4:

Creative learning experiences should align with demand.

Although access to creative learning opportunities lies at the heart of Thriving Minds, Big Thought believes it is equally important to provide children with programs that interest them. Our city can offer an abundance of opportunities. However, the effort is wasted if what is offered is not what children want and parents do not know about it.

In 2007, Big Thought conducted a citywide inventory of existing offerings at Dallas ISD and the Dallas Public Library system's 27 branches. (Dallas Park and Recreation Department provided just a sample of their inventory due to new tracking procedures.) We laid this data side-by-side with survey information collected from more than 5,000 parents and students in grades 1 through 12 between fall 2007 and spring 2009. From these sources, we learned that students were interested in all forms of art. However, depending on age, certain art forms were more "in demand."

We merged and reported the inventory produced by all these partners to answer key questions

- **Who** received opportunities to learn (by age)?
- **What** learning did they receive (by subject)?
- **How** much learning did they receive (in hours)?
- **How costly** was it?
- **Where** was the learning offered?

When comparing the inventory to students' wishes, we found discrepancies between what was offered and to whom it was being offered. The pathway graphic on the next page reveals students' reported demand.

For example, we identified a mismatch between supply and demand in 2007. Although between 70% and 80% of children were interested in pursuing dance and music, there was not enough supply in either area to meet demand. As more information became available in 2008 we also discovered that teen-specific programs were limited to in-school courses and a few community programs. In most cases, community programs grouped middle school and elementary age students together, while high school teens were offered "15 and up" programs dominated by adults.

Another mismatch between supply and demand was found in analyzing the type of programs that were being offered. Many were observational (i.e., sit and watch) when what

was needed was for children to be able to have the chance to create. Beyond Dallas ISD's in-school instruction, only 53%, or just barely half of the creative learning offerings, provided direct instruction and time to create (i.e., learn and do). Most simply asked children to appreciate and learn as an audience member, sparking an interest that very likely may not be followed by the opportunity to pursue that interest by doing, making and creating.

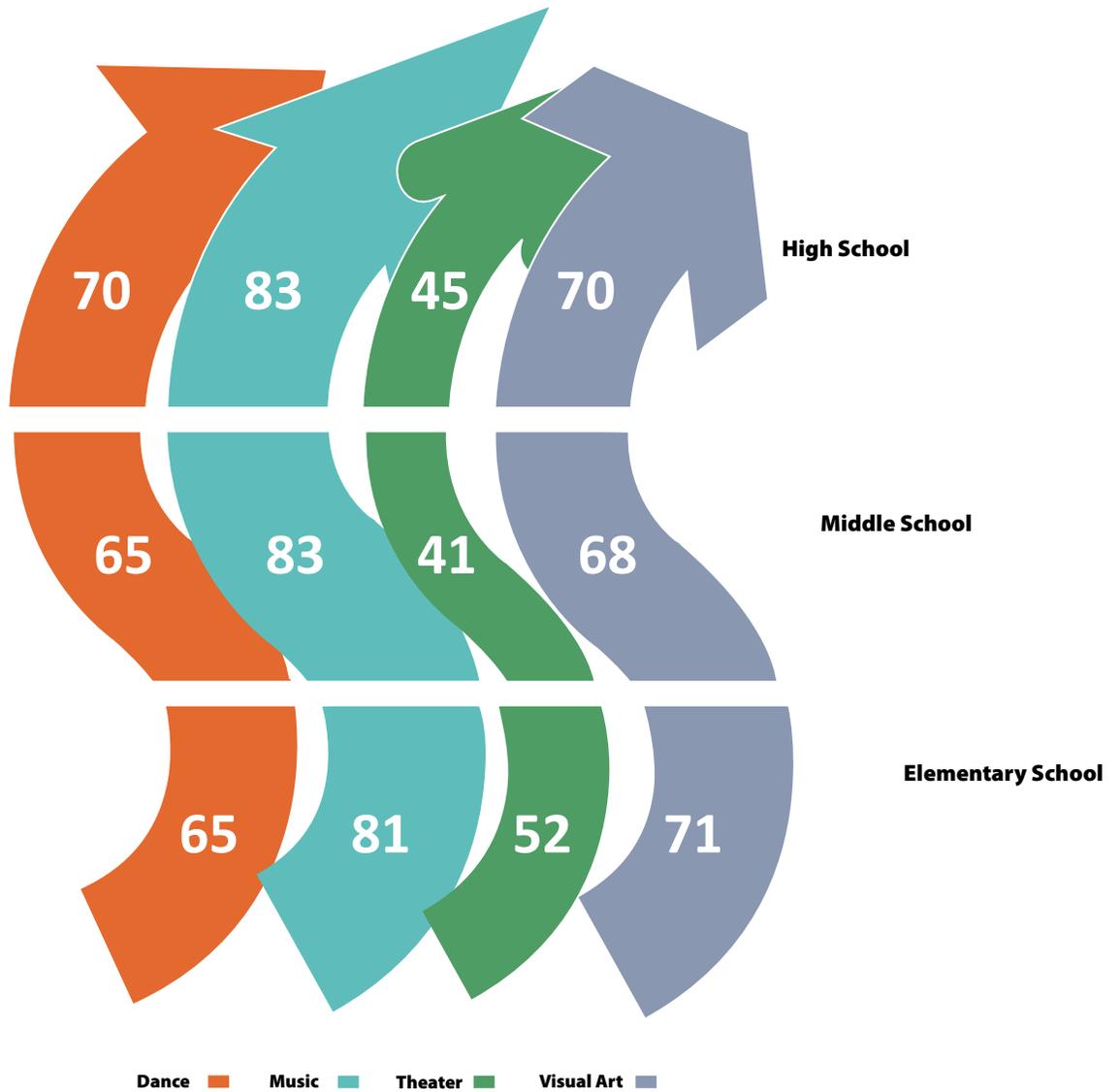
As outlined on page 7, we increased the amount of music and visual arts programming in Dallas ISD elementary schools by adding additional instructors. Beyond simply increasing supply, we determined that the most effective way to steer supply closer to demand was through extensive communication among stakeholders. It was critical that families were fully aware of existing creative learning opportunities, and that our partners understood what people want.

- We made the community more aware of existing programming through a multi-year communications plan with strategies to reach three primary constituencies: parents, families and children; policy makers and the philanthropic community.
- We called on our partners—community members, Dallas ISD Communications, City of Dallas Public Information and cultural organizations—to help implement communications strategies.
- We held a series of community conversations where we informed the Thriving Minds' steering committee and programmatic partners about the mismatch between supply and demand.

We are already seeing the needle move in response to these communication efforts.

- In 2008-09, City of Dallas recreation centers either maintained or substantially increased the number of dance courses. In fact, at Pleasant Oaks recreation center, where Thriving Minds' members have been actively working, the number of dance courses went from none to 90 in 2008-09.
- Dallas Public Library opened Teen Centers at all 27 branches in August 2009.
- Thriving Minds expanded to include a teen apprentice program to support elementary and middle school summer camps in June 2009.

Percent of Students' Demand for Learning



THE BOTTOM LINE

Children must have access not just to programs—but also to programs that interest them. By communicating with families about existing programs, better understanding what children want—and are not receiving—and working with partners to expand and focus their programming, we're moving closer to matching supply and demand.

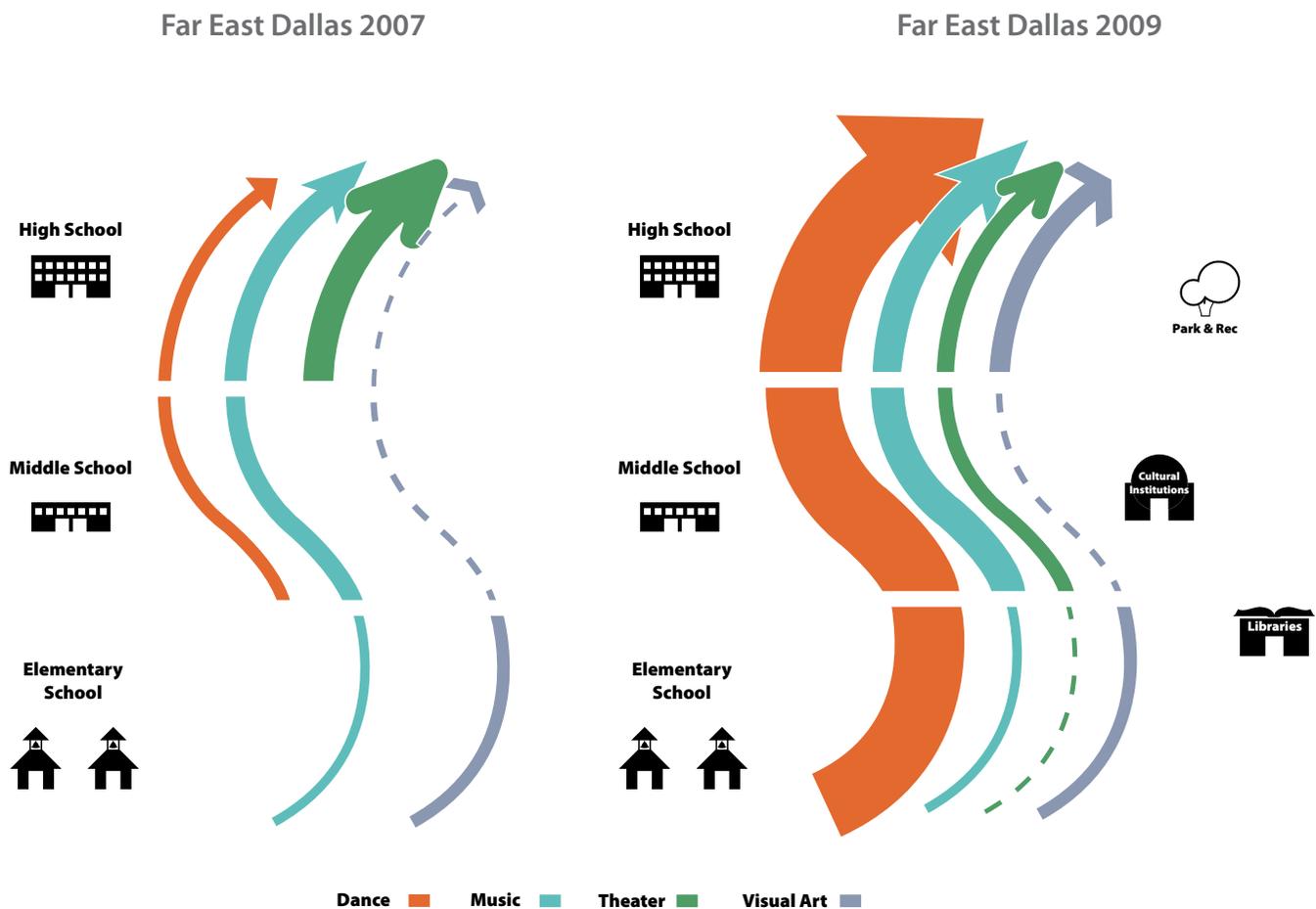
Learning 5:

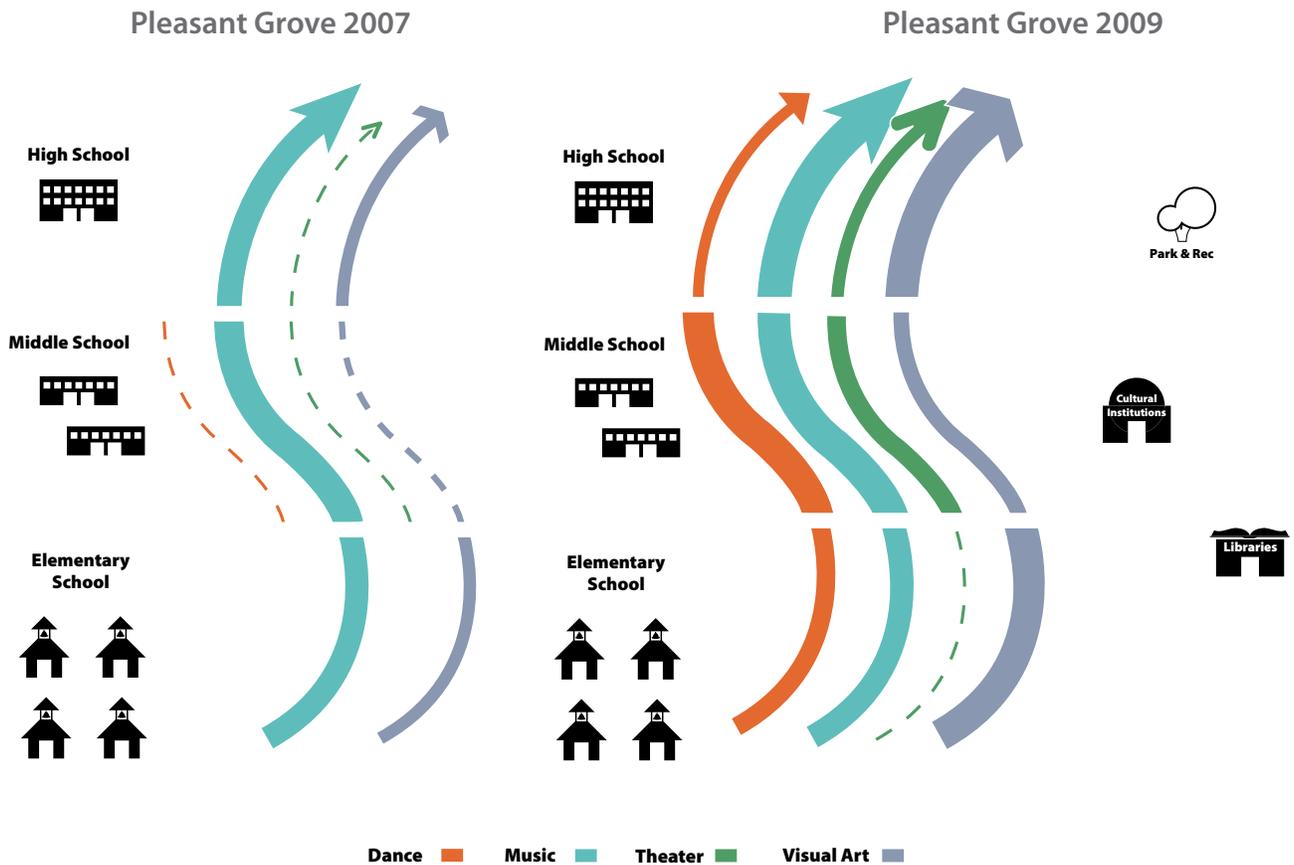
Where children live often determines their access to creative learning.

From the beginning, we were aware of citywide inequities in access to creative learning. We knew that in some parts of Dallas—in particular, the north—highly-resourced families had access to a gold mine of creative learning experiences. Other families, especially those in southern parts of the city, had little or no access. To overcome the challenge, we believed it was important to examine inequities at a more grassroots level—neighborhood by neighborhood.

In 2007, Big Thought held focus groups with parents and other family members in three neighborhoods located in very different regions of Dallas. We discovered that not only were mismatches neighborhood-specific, but each neighborhood had its own set of programming priorities. For example, although we knew that dance programs were lacking system-wide, we discovered a wealth of dance programming in the Far East Dallas neighborhood. These focus groups re-established the importance of neighborhood-based decision-making.

Knowing public schools provide the educational foundation for more than 75% of Dallas children, we started examining neighborhood creative learning opportunities by illustrating the number and variety of classes offered in “feeder patterns.” The majority of students in a given community move from elementary school, to middle school, to the high school located in their neighborhoods following a predetermined pathway.





Working with the belief that geography should not determine a child’s access to quality creative learning, and that neighborhoods could best determine what they needed, we established a system of neighborhood hubs, focusing on places where building more opportunities for young people was critical.

We began by identifying three different neighborhoods and hiring community managers to work with each (Far East Dallas, Oak Cliff and Pleasant Grove). The managers worked closely with neighbors, neighborhood organizations and program providers to determine creative learning goals for the summer of 2007. Together, the managers and neighbors located programs that could fill the gaps that were identified. Each neighborhood developed a distinctive plan of activities to meet their unique needs.

The lessons learned from these neighborhoods paved the way for Big Thought to expand to three additional neighborhoods in 2008, for a total of six year-round Thriving Minds neighborhood sites. In the fall of 2008, responding to information collected through community partners and parents’

desire for increased after-school programming, Big Thought and Dallas ISD partnered on an after-school grant. Once again, this provided the opportunity to make rich creative learning opportunities available more widely throughout the city. The resulting funds have allowed Thriving Minds to expand into a total of 13 distinct neighborhoods served by after-school programming in 20 different schools. This out-of-school time program shows great promise for ensuring that every child in every neighborhood has access to creative learning opportunities.

Knowledge of out-of-school time programming has dramatically improved over the course of the past two years through a cultural community collaboration lead by Dallas’ Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA). Working with Big Thought, the OCA redesigned their annual collection of members programmatic information which represent 40+ institutions. By creating a neighborhood level look at where programming was being delivered, supply could and has been moved to complement and fill gaps. This marked improvement is illustrated in two neighborhoods’ pathway graphics showing where we began in 2007 and the strides that were made by the close of 2009. However, we will continue to address the needs that still exist in the coming years.

THE BOTTOM LINE

All children deserve access to creative learning opportunities—no matter where they reside. Thriving Minds’ system of neighborhood-based hubs ensures that creative learning is everywhere children live and learn.

Learning 6:

For true equity, high quality teaching and learning must be ensured.

In 2006, The Wallace Foundation commissioned Harvard Project Zero to examine and understand what “quality arts learning” means to those who provide the programs as well as how they achieve and sustain that quality. The study, published in 2009,²² and the preliminary research conducted in Dallas and across the U.S. served to underscore the need to focus attention beyond supply and demand.

This national attention, along with earlier local research identifying positive student outcomes only possible when high quality teaching and learning took place,²³ propelled the community’s discussions on standards for creative learning. Participants included instructors from every partner organization, neighborhood and setting.

As a first step, we developed a common language for assessing quality, drawing on national arts standards, 21st Century Skill Framework,²⁴ and the research of the Institute for Learning²⁵—work underpinning Dallas ISD’s new curriculum. By collaborating with cultural partners, teaching artists, classroom teachers and researchers, we created six dimensions that defined what the community saw as different aspects or dimensions of quality. This became the foundation for what is now a three-year effort to observe, discuss and improve creative teaching and learning across the city.

Six Dimensions of Quality: Teaching and Learning

SUPPORTS FOR LEARNING

Climate that Supports Art Learning

Engagement and Investment in Learning

RIGOROUS AND CREATIVE LEARNING

Classroom Dialogue and Sharing

Skills, Techniques and Knowledge of the Discipline

Creative Choices

Expectations, Assessment and Recognition

From June 2007 through June 2008, quality review panels, consisting of teachers, community artists and researchers, observed 116 programs and venues throughout Dallas to get a baseline reading of the quality of existing programming. It became apparent that across the city, the quality of teaching and learning was uneven. Observers judged that nearly two thirds of the offerings only met the most basic expectations. Opportunities intended to build children’s creativity were often only routine. At the same time, there were examples of energetic, inspired, and imaginative classrooms and programs that made it clear that excellence and innovation are not only possible, but are part of the fabric of Dallas.

From November 2008 to June 2009, 196 sites were observed. More than half of these were in-school fine arts classes in Dallas ISD elementary, middle and high schools, as well as after-school and summer programs. Once again, geographic differences were telling. Quality varied geographically and where a child lived often predicted not only the amount but also the excellence of his or her creative learning. Quality also varied by contexts or types of programs. For instance, out-of-school and summer opportunities were often concentrated on safe and fun activities rather than learning.

²² Seidel, Steve, Shari Tishman, Ellen Winner, Lois Hetland, Patricia Palmer, *The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education*, Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2009.

²³ Wolf, Dennis, Jennifer Bransom, Katy Denson, *More Than Measuring: Program Evaluation as an Opportunity to Build the Capacity of Communities*, Big Thought, 2006.

²⁴ <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/>

²⁵ <http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ifl/media/pdf/makingamericasmarter.pdf>

As a result of this research, the following are being developed:

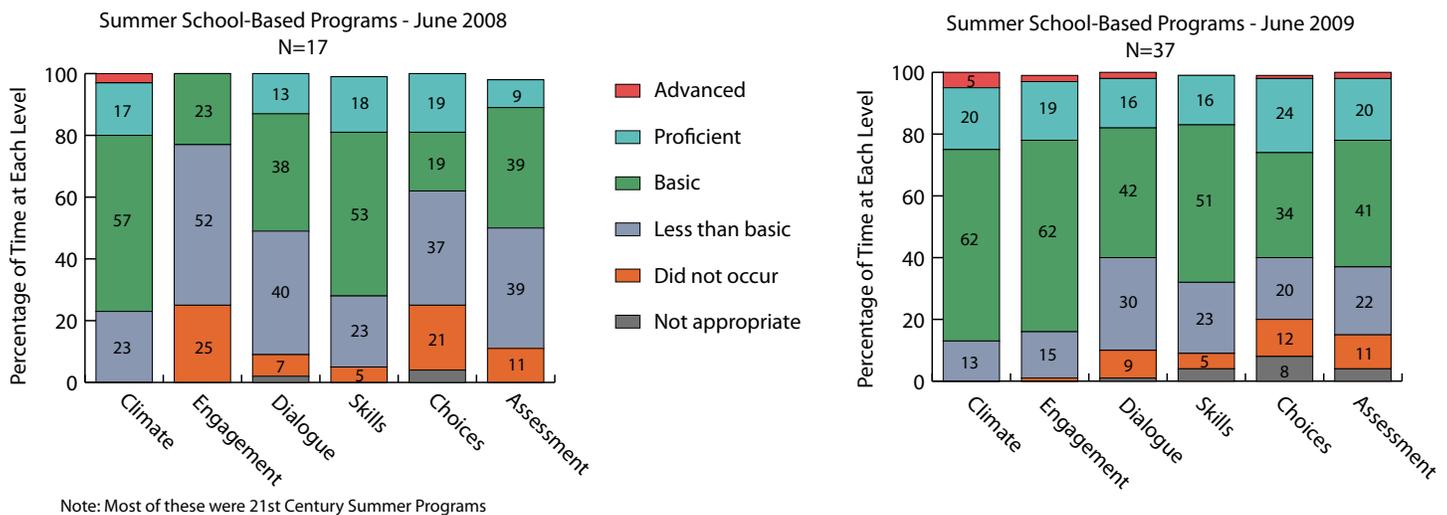
- a set of civic outcomes for out-of-school time creative learning and selected quality creative learning programs that serve these goals;
- an instructional framework for out-of-school creative learning that complement the new in-school curricula developed as an early part of Thriving Minds;
- an ongoing curriculum revision process in Dallas ISD Fine Arts that takes dimensions of quality findings and teacher feedback into consideration;
- standards of service for all campuses and measures to ensure equity of access to quality arts programs for all Dallas ISD students.

Highlights of improved professional development opportunities include:

- conference-style opportunities offering Dallas ISD teachers a choice of sessions conducted by nationally recognized clinicians;
- sequential Orff training for music specialists over multiple years;
- a tiered, 40-hour, curriculum-based course for out-of-school time creative learning instructors with training modules for novice, experienced and master instructors.

These training efforts to improve out-of-school learning are showing promise. The existing data suggest the quality of instruction has increased based on comparisons of summer school data from 2008 to 2009:

- “Advanced” (highest level) ratings increased in five of six criterion while “Less Than Basic” scores (lowest levels) decreased.
- 52% of school-based instruction received a “Less Than Basic” score on “Engagement.” In 2009 that figure was reduced to 15%.
- The pattern of increase in “Proficient” and above scores in each category suggests our training is effective in moving instructors beyond the basic level.



THE BOTTOM LINE

It is not enough to provide children with choice and opportunities. The offerings must be of consistently high quality. The development of quality standards and a trained creative learning workforce will ensure that all children will have access to excellence in creative learning.

Paving Pathways to Success

The importance of building creative capital in children is clear. We also know that families and children are often forced to cobble together opportunities to ensure that children can pursue creative development. As we expanded our work beyond the classroom doors, further into the neighborhoods, we see that widespread community support and engagement is also a key ingredient to success.

When Thriving Minds began, Dallas had a bustling cultural scene offering a variety of educational outreach experiences. However, while there were many opportunities that led to rewarding creative learning experiences from pre-school to college, very few connected to one another or formed continuous learning pathways. There was no systemic coordination and community access to information was limited.

We needed to develop a coordinated system of creative learning opportunities. To do that, we needed to build the creative capital of our entire city.

Building the creative capital of a city requires a community-wide change in the way creativity is viewed. We must engage and inform families, as well as civic and business leaders. We have to increase support for community instructors and cultural institutions, and advocate for more new city and public school policies.

Today, Dallas has a plan for a system of pathways of opportunity for young people based on a collaborative network of diverse constituents and a community-wide vision and working strategy. There is a coordinated system of creative learning with improved equity, access and quality. There is growing public awareness of the impact of creative learning and progressive advocacy for institutionalized support. The change has begun.

No single institution can effect change of this magnitude. It takes the minds and imaginations of people across the city. Together, we built Thriving Minds on the strength of several principles:

Partnership: Thriving Minds is a partnership of cultural, educational, civic and community-based organizations. By engaging stakeholders at a number of levels in each of these areas, from influencers to on-the-ground implementers of creative learning opportunities, we were able to build consensus and grassroots support.



COMMUNITY VOICE: “I really love to sing and I want to get better and better. I participate in my high school choir. I also practice every Monday evening for my church choir. And, this year I’m taking vocal lessons for the first time ever. My mom found a nonprofit within walking distance from my high school. I go there after school on Thursdays for individual lessons.”

—Kayla, 11th grade student

Communication: Community conversations were the bedrock upon which Thriving Minds was founded. Today, a multi-year marketing and communications plan targets our main constituencies, including families, children, funders, policy makers and educators. Keeping them engaged and informed is absolutely critical to our ongoing success.

Technology: A solid technological infrastructure has allowed us to collect data, communicate with stakeholders, disseminate program information and improve our handling of back-office functions.

Accountability: We addressed barriers related to data collection, analysis and information dissemination, allowing us to identify and track services our city has and those it needs, the quality of programs and services, and their impact on the people we serve.

Advocacy: We continue to expand awareness and involvement, both within and outside the partnership. A key strategy has been to extend our advocacy efforts beyond leadership to include “deputies”—people who are next in line for positions of power. By engaging these people we are garnering support from the next generation of people who can influence creative learning.

Financial sustainability has been one of the most important and challenging areas of focus. Thriving Minds is a public-private partnership. Funding from Dallas ISD and the City of Dallas is leveraged with private sector funds from corporations, government foundations and individual contributors.

Thriving Minds’ support is divided into three categories:

1. **Cash:** Funding provided to Big Thought for direct spending on Thriving Minds programming and activities.
2. **Committed Resources:** Funding committed to Thriving Minds-related activities that does not actually pass through the partnership itself. This includes Dallas ISD’s spending on new fine arts teachers and the City of Dallas’ spending on certain community arts activities.
3. **Annual Leverage:** Resources from partners whose programming and impact will be coordinated and improved through Thriving Minds’ activities, even though the resources may not be dedicated purely to Thriving Minds.

Even in the early days, the leveraging power of the public-private partnership was apparent. Thriving Minds’ cash spending in Year 1 to Year 3 was \$22.7 million. During that time, Thriving Minds partners spent \$30.5 million in committed resources for Thriving Minds-related activities.

The roll-out and expansion of Thriving Minds across the city has brought both financial and philosophical buy-in from partners and funders. The successes detailed in this report have led to a loyal and committed base of donors, a series of credible recurring revenue streams and a successful endowment effort.

Building the creative capital of a city is a process that will continue as the Thriving Minds system grows. As we continue to educate and engage our city’s leaders, philanthropists, educators, artists, service providers and families, we pave the pathways that lead to success.



Moving Forward

For 2010-13, the overall goal of the Thriving Minds' work is to increase the depth and quality of the system offerings already in place. We will also concentrate on connecting out-of-school time programs and bringing them to scale. New efforts continue to address the core issues of equity, access, and quality. We believe that every child should have equal **access** to high quality offerings. Indeed, systemic **equity** can only be achieved when there is widespread access to high **quality** creative learning opportunities.

access + quality = equity

The priorities for the next four years reflect this conviction.

Increase Access

Similarly, developing quality creative learning programs is not enough—for true equity all children must have access to such programs, both in and out-of-school, and they must have the support that allows them to succeed. Thriving Minds will:

- create and update neighborhood asset maps detailing both available creative learning resources and gaps in service;
- establish year-round program sites in every Dallas neighborhood;
- build a core of 500+ neighborhood leaders who plan and implement creative learning opportunities in their community;
- coordinate a set of civic outcomes for strong out-of-school time and secondary level creative learning that align and build upon the in-school work begun in elementary grades.

Increase quality

Thriving Minds will continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the system. Quality teaching and learning was carefully defined by the Dallas community in Phase I providing a framework for further efforts going forward. By establishing and monitoring standards of quality, the opportunity and achievement gap between children in high and low resourced neighborhoods can be addressed. Specifically, Thriving Minds will:

- increase the number and diversity of trained, qualified creative learning instructors;
- certify experienced artists as master teachers who mentor novice and apprentice instructors;
- create an instructor qualification system;
- provide enhanced professional development for in-school instructors to deepen quality by attending to standards, district curricula and creative learning framework;
- provide other tiered professional development for creative learning instructors.

We have seen that creative children are successful in many ways that go well beyond their creativity. Given more and better opportunities, they will make choices that build their creative capital. Family support is also critical. Big Thought, through the Thriving Minds partnership, is committed to helping children and families realize their aspirations and goals for creative learning. We are also steadfast in our commitment to address the mismatch between supply and demand, evening out equitable access across neighborhoods and developing robust pathways of opportunity for children of all ages in all disciplines.

School campuses have emerged as natural hubs of activity for each neighborhood. But we recognize that not every neighborhood has a school operating in that way. We will continue to seek private and public funding for Thriving Minds after-school programs. By providing staffing and engaging parents, we can help each school connect and respond to community needs and aspirations.

In addition, we will continue taking a yearly inventory of creative learning opportunities so that a central source of information is available to Big Thought and our partners. This inventory will provide an ongoing map of the offerings, and we will be able to detect changes in the system, where gaps are closed and where new gaps may emerge. As we share this information with our own programmers and our partners, we will be able for the first time to ensure that Dallas children and families are getting the opportunities they want and that they are getting these opportunities where they're needed most.

As Big Thought begins Phase II of Thriving Minds, our vision remains unchanged—**successful children, strong families** and **vibrant neighborhoods**. Since 2007, we have listened, we have learned and we have responded. Now, thanks to the partners, we have come together once again to turn the vision into reality.



COMMUNITY VOICE: “As a community, I feel like we are all getting better—we’re making strides towards how we’d like to see things differently. Before I thought quality was somebody else’s job. Now, I take much more responsibility. I have a greater interest in getting my hand in there and changing things up and making things work.”

—Kent Williams, Teaching Artist

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to the following for contributing to the planning, implementation and evaluation of Thriving Minds, a partnership that includes the City of Dallas, Dallas Independent School District and more than 100 arts, cultural and community organizations. This is an incomplete list as work has involved the aspirations, efforts and sacrifices of so many people that it would be impossible to name and thank them all.

If you are reading this report, you are part of this powerful collection of change agents seeking to make the world a better place for children.

Convening Partners, Key Leadership and Staff

Big Thought:

Board of Directors, Giselle Antoni,
Jessica Malek, Gina Thorsen

Dallas Independent School District:

Board of Trustees, Dr. Michael Hinojosa,
Craig Welle, Dr. Nancy Kihneman

City of Dallas:

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About Big Thought

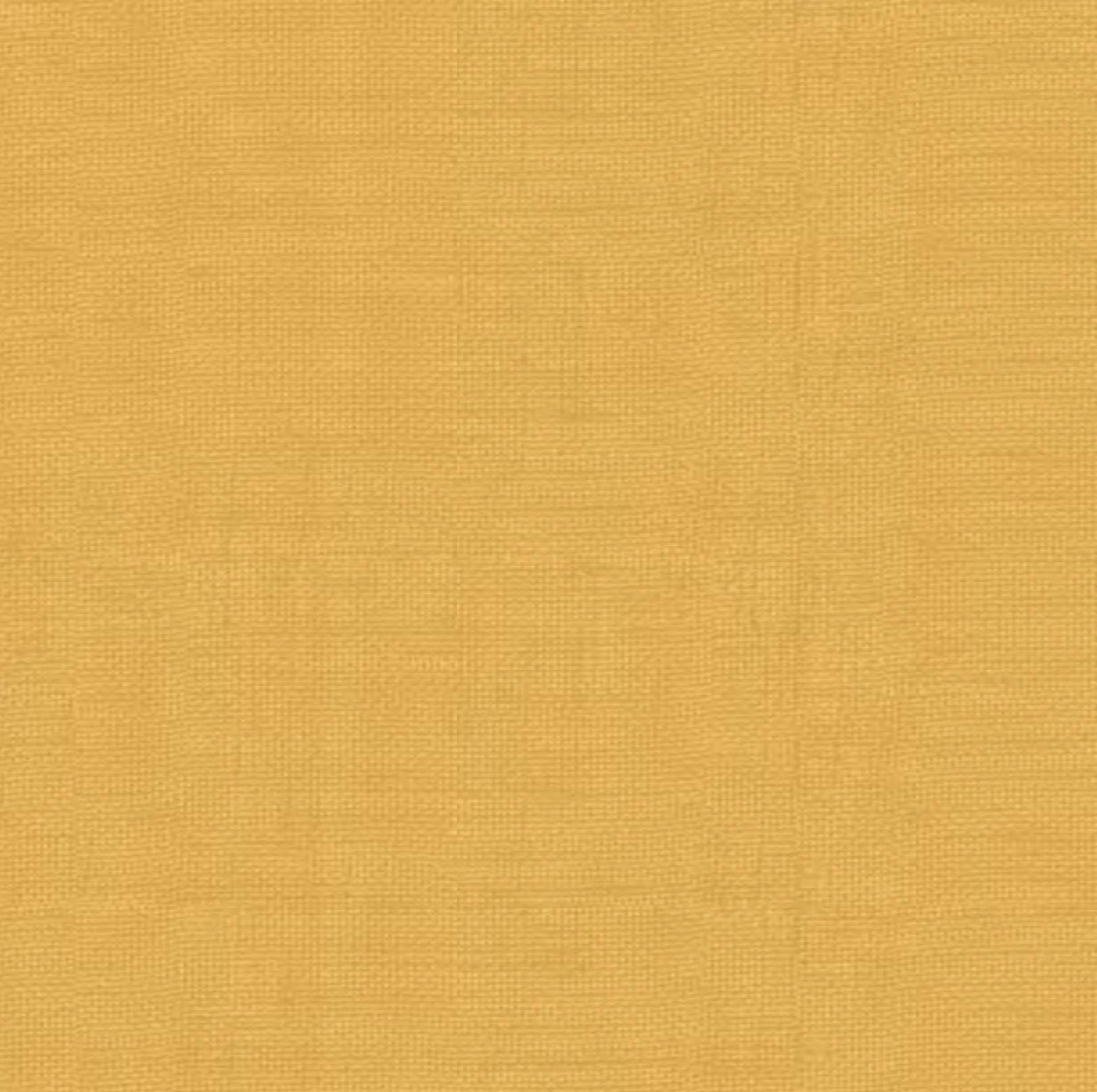
Founded in 1987, Dallas-based Big Thought is one of the nation's leading nonprofits devoted to closing the opportunity gap in education through creative learning. Driven by its mission—to make imagination a part of everyday learning—Big Thought develops groundbreaking programs to address problem-solving, life skills and workforce development, providing children with pathways to success.

Through our innovative partnerships, Big Thought delivers close to one million hours of programming and serves more than 300,000 students, teachers, parents, caregivers and mentors annually. A model to cities across America, Big Thought has achieved national recognition, including the Americans for the Arts "2009 Arts in Education Award" and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities "Coming Up Taller Award" in 2004. Learn more at bigthought.org.

Thriving Minds Partners*

1st Class Kids/Chefsville-Kids	Dallas Museum of Art	Mahogany Dance Theatre of Texas	St. Pius X Early Care and Education Center
A.R.T.S. for People	Dallas Parks and Recreation	Making~Connections, Inc.	Sway Enterprises
Act of Change	Dallas Public Libraries	Meadows Museum, SMU	Teatro Dallas
African American Museum	Dallas Summer Musicals	Meadows School of the Arts, SMU	TeCo Theatrical Productions, Inc.
Amelia Flores Youth and Family Center	Dallas Symphony Orchestra	Meyerson Symphony Center	Texana Living History Association
America Scores Dallas	Dallas Theater Center	MLK Core Services	Texas Discovery Gardens at Fair Park
Angel Faces/ENCORE! After School & Summer Programs	Dallas Zoo	Moorland YMCA	The Bath House
Anita N. Martinez Ballet Folklorico, Inc.	Daniel de Cordoba Bailes Espanoles	Museum of Geometric & MADI Art	The Black Academy of Arts and Letters (TBAAL)
Artreach-Dallas, Inc.	Dawn's Early Light	Museum of Nature & Science	The Blue Shoe Project
Audubon Texas - Trinity River Audubon Center	Drama Kids International	Museum of the American Railroad	The Dallas Opera
Avance	Eddie Bernice Johnson Youth & Family Health Center	Nasher Sculpture Center	The Institute for Leadership and Educational Excellence, Inc
Ayubu Kamau Kings & Queens	Ella Louise Hudson Ensemble/ Inspiring Creative Imaginations	New Arts Six	The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza
Bakari Institute	Ferguson Road Initiative	New Hope Community Center	The Wilkonson Center
Bath House Cultural Center	Ferguson-Oates Head Start	Nexus Child Development Center	The Women's Museum: An Institute for the Future
Buckner Child and Family Center	Fine Arts Chamber Players	North Dallas Kids Stage	The Writer's Garret
Campfire USA	Frontiers of Flight Museum	North Texas Food Bank	Theatre Britain
CAMP (Collaborating Artists Media Project, Inc.)	Girl Scouts	Oak Cliff Cultural Center	Theatre Three
Central Dallas Ministries	Girls, Inc.	Oak Cliff YMCA	Tipi Tellers
Circle Ten Council/Learning for Life	Grupo Pakal Mayan Performing Arts	Old Red Museum of Dallas County History & Culture	TITAS
City of Dallas, Office of Cultural Affairs	Imagine the Impossible...for Every Child	Ollimpaxqui Ballet Company, Inc.	Today Marks the Beginning
Creative Arts Center of Dallas	International House of Blues Foundation	Orchestra of New Spain	Trinity River Mission
Dallas Afterschool Network	International Museum of Cultures	Parkland Health and Hospital System	USA Film Festival/KidFilm
Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park	Jammer Time Express	Park South YMCA	UXL (Uniquely Inspiring Youth To Excel Inc)
Dallas Arboretum	Japan America Society of Dallas/ Fort Worth	Phoenix House	Voices of Change
Dallas Arts District Alliance	Jewish Community Center of Dallas	Plump Dumpling Creations	West Dallas Community Centers, Inc.
Dallas Black Dance Theatre	Juanita Craft Civil Rights House	Rossi Walter	YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas
Dallas Children's Theater	Junior Players	Science Safari	Yogakids Bridge of Diamonds
Dallas Concillio	KimKares.com	Shakespeare Dallas	Young Art Institute
Dallas Contemporary	Lakewest Family YMCA	Slappy & Monday's Foundation for Laughter	Young Audiences of North Texas
Dallas Heritage Village	Latino Cultural Center	South Dallas Cultural Center	Young Rembrandts
Dallas Historical Society	Mad Science of Greater Dallas	St. Anthony's Community Center	
Dallas Holocaust Museum/ Center for Education and Tolerance		St. Phillips School and Community Center	

*Thriving Minds Phase I Partners as of print date



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